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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001801

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF AND PM/RSAT

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [SU](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN ARMY 6BN DEPLOYMENT TO DARFUR

REF: ADDIS ABABA 3564

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN CAMPBELL FOR REASONS 1.5 b AND d.

11. (C) Summary. On October 22, a senior Nigerian military officer told Post that Nigeria intended to deploy the 6th Battalion from Abak to Darfur on October 28. This is a change from the GON's preferred unit, 72d Para Battalion, in response to USG concerns over that unit's human rights record. He said this change, however, leaves the newly designated unit untrained and unequipped for deployment to Sudan. An airplane fuel shortage may significantly limit the ability to perform airlift from Nigeria. A planning conference will be held by Nigerian Defense Headquarters on Tuesday, October 26 to establish a deployment timeline, though Nigeria has not yet received a formal request for deployment from the AU. Biographic information on General Okonkwo follows. End Summary.

12. (C) On October 22, DAO received information from a highly-placed officer in the office of the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) identifying the selection of 6th Battalion from Abak for deployment to Darfur on October 28. This was confirmed by the Deputy Director (Air) for Peacekeeping Operations (DDA/PKO) at Defense Headquarters later that evening. DAO reported DDA/PKO did not show a sense of urgency for this deployment, though the unit was unequipped for this mission and has not gone through a pre-deployment train-up (Note: The typical pre-PKO deployment train-up is at least six weeks long. End note.) DDA/PKO also said that a planning conference was scheduled for Tuesday, October 26 to establish a deployment timeline. Embassy DATT has asked to make an assessment of the 6th Battalion.

13. (C) The October 28 deployment date was set by the African Union (reftel), apparently without reference to airlift availability.

14. (C) If 6 Bn is deployed from Abak, the closest military airfields are in Calabar and Port Harcourt. Travel to either of these airfields will require overland movement through the Niger Delta region, some of the most dangerous areas in Nigeria. Road conditions in this area are not good and the availability of sufficient wheeled transport and gasoline to move the battalion should not be assumed. Additionally, commercial airlines in Nigeria have experienced fuel shortages so severe as to require the cancellation of scheduled flights in the last week. The availability of fuel for lift aircraft at these airfields should also not be assumed.

15. (C) DAO and PolMilOff met with Major General Okonkwo (biographic note below) October 23 to discuss deployment of the 6th Battalion. Okonkwo confirmed that the 6th Battalion was identified, but he also did not think that the October 28 deployment date was feasible. He said that basic soldier items necessary for deployment, such as boots and uniforms, had been issued to 72d Para Bn in anticipation of their deployment, and those items could not be taken away to give to the newly designated unit. When asked, he said that the first week of November might be a reasonable date to begin deployment. He said that donor support for these soldier items would not be required. Funds had been requested from, and made available by, the Presidency and the items would likely be procured from a commercial company in Kano.

16. (C) Okonkwo also confirmed that a planning conference will take place on October 26, and said that he would be returning to Sudan on that day. However, General Agwai (COAS) is in Accra and will not return to Abuja until Wednesday, October 27. Okonkwo also said that a formal AU request for deployment of the Nigerian units still has not been received.

17. (C) Okonkwo said that the 6th Battalion will deploy from either Port Harcourt or from Calabar, but he has not heard of a preference for either one. DAO said the EUCOM planners had expressed a preference for Port Harcourt if U.S. airlift is used because it is a larger, more capable airfield. He said that the deployment would be of two companies of 196 soldiers each, plus 41 soldiers to augment the Nigerian company already deployed. Okonkwo also said that the units would not be deploying with vehicles, with the possible exception of APCs. He said that each company-sized sector would have

three wheeled APCs to act as a deterrent force at their command posts. He would not commit to any specifics about the APCs, and it was not clear if the units would deploy with organic APCs or receive them in Sudan.

Biographic Note

18. (C) Okonkwo received a promotion to Major General on October 22—a promotion he said has been due since April, but he has not been in Nigeria to receive it. He said he is planning to remain in Sudan until his contract expires in April 2005. He believes he will remain the force commander in Sudan, and his promotion shows that the Nigerian military has confidence in his ability to perform in that capacity. A Brigadier General will be assigned as a deputy, likely from Ghana, and the current Ghanaian Chief Military Observer will become the Chief of Staff for the expanded AU mission.

19. (C) Okonkwo was in ECOMOG in Liberia in 1995-97, serving as Monrovia Task Force Commander. He returned to Liberia in July 2003 as ECOMIL Commander and then served as Deputy Force Commander of UNMIL until he departed Liberia in April 2004 for his current AU assignment.

110. (C) From the Nigerian Command and General Staff College Yearbook, 1988: Major F. O. Okonkwo was born on May 30, 1951 at Enugwu Agidi in Nji Koka Local Government Area of Anambra State. He attended St. James's and St. Michael's Primary Schools in Kaduna. His secondary education was obtained at Williams Memorial Grammar School, Afugiri Umuahia. Major Okonkwo was commissioned into the Nigerian Army on June 21, 1975 and posted to Headquarters, Brigade of Guards but changed to Armoured Corps in October 1977. He attended various courses including Young Officers Course, Armour, (NAAS); Jungle Warfare (NASI); AJSC, CSC; Tank Commander's Course, USSR; and Tank Technology Course, India. He held the following appointments: Company Commander, Infantry; Company Commander, Armour; General Service Officer 3, Training; SO II Equipment/QSVCs; SI Auto. Major Okonkwo is married with two children. His hobbies include athletics and table tennis.

111. (U) Minimize considered.
CAMPBELL